

Pocket recorder inaudible dud

The Voice Memo is a delightful new gadget that I'd love to see improved.

This tiny, battery-operated recorder, billed as the "executive idea keeper," tucks neatly into your pocket and can quickly and easily be pulled out to "jot down" those important ideas that strike you while driving, jogging, or whatever.

Weighing in at just 2.5 ounces and measuring approximately 3½ inches by 2¾ inches, you'd think the Voice Memo would be a handy alternative to the microcassette recorder. But it has a fatal flaw — low sound volume.

The message playback is so faint you can hardly hear it. And there's no way to adjust the volume.

At first I thought maybe the batteries that came with the unit might be low, so I bought new ones. But even with new batteries, the device has to be firmly pressed to your ear in order to hear the message. The distributor says this



Hillel Segal

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is apparently normal, but they hadn't received any complaints on the 500 units sold since it was introduced.

In all fairness, I have to admit to some fascination with this little, gadget. It's the first of its kind on the market and, I believe, will probably spawn many clones in the near future.

Unlike microcassette recorders, the Voice Memo operates on a tape loop. This allows for only 30 seconds of recorded messages, but I was surprised to find just how much information can be recorded in that time. It's not a machine that will serve the same function as the microcassette, but it can fill its own niche for the busy execu-

tive.

It is relatively simple to operate, with one sliding switch to play, record and turn off, and a second to indicate a message and to block off the record function. This is a fairly efficient way of keeping yourself from overwriting existing messages.

The Voice Memo also provides a function that automatically stops the tape, after one cycle, preventing accidental message erasure.

Unfortunately, there are other drawbacks despite the low play volume.

As with most "firsts," the Voice Memo has a high price tag. Made in Japan by Plus Corp. and distributed by Sharper Image stores in the United States, it sells for a whopping \$29, plus \$2.50 delivery. I would guess that as better and

louder units are introduced by the competition, we'll see prices drop to the \$7 to \$10 range.

Although equipped with a slide switch to presumably lock the record function, it's not foolproof. I found it altogether too easy to dislodge the message switch during the normal operation of the record switch.

Voice Memo uses a fairly unusual power source: two "N" size batteries. I was able to locate them at a large hardware store, but you can't count on finding them at the local grocery store.

The bottom line: The Voice Memo is a fantastic idea, but a recorder that can't be heard is worthless at any price. I suggest, that you pass this one up.



Hillel Segal's column has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.